THE LAST FIRST KISS
In the midst of the chaos, there was only one thing that mattered. One man.
MATILDE OLIVEIRA

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The last first kiss

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The room pulsed with the kind of energy that could only come from the convergence of power, wealth, and ambition. The air was thick with the scent of expensive perfume and the low murmur of whispered conversations. Valentina barely registered the clink of champagne glasses or the flashes of cameras that fired like electric bursts in every direction. She could hardly even hear the chatter of the reporters lingering near the windows of the penthouse suite, their voices muffled by the distance between them.

In the midst of the chaos, there was only one thing that mattered.

One man.

Juan Carlos Rodríguez.

He sat at the center of the room, the light above him glinting off the edges of his perfectly tailored suit. His dark hair was swept back with practiced ease, but it was his eyes, those sharp, molten eyes, that held her. The same eyes that had once promised her the world, that had been full of dreams and devotion and endless nights wrapped in each other's arms. She'd known those eyes when they had been filled with warmth, affection, vulnerability.

Now, they were cold. Calculating. A politician's eyes.

And as much as she hated to admit it, she felt herself drawn in by them again.

It had been years since they last spoke, years since she'd turned her back on him, on the promises he made, on the love they shared. She had walked away when the world had become too much, when the lies had stacked so high that even the strength of their love couldn't hold it all together.

But now, standing across the room in the middle of a media frenzy, it felt like no time had passed. His presence, his aura, his sheer magnetism, he was the same man who had once made her feel like she was the center of his universe.

And yet, she knew better now.

Juan Carlos Rodríguez was no longer the boy who had kissed her on the small, forgotten streets of Mexico City. The one who'd laughed and whispered promises under the stars. No, the man before her now was a force, unstoppable, inevitable, fierce and she had a sinking feeling that she was about to be swept up in his current once again.

She didn't know what terrified her more, the way he made her feel like she was sixteen again, or the way she couldn't tell if he still remembered her. If he even cared to.

His eyes locked on hers from across the room, and the world seemed to pause. The noise, the cameras, the flashing lights, they all dimmed in comparison to the connection that pulsed between them. It was almost as if the years apart hadn't existed, as if she could still feel the weight of his touch, the press of his lips against her skin.

Valentina's breath caught in her throat. She hadn't prepared for this. She hadn't prepared for *him*. For this magnetic pull that could undo everything she had worked so hard to build, her career, her independence, her walls.

"Valentina."

His voice was a low murmur that sliced through the buzz of the room like a knife through silk. It was a command, but it was soft, almost intimate. And for a second, just a breath, she didn't know if she wanted to run or move closer.

Her body betrayed her as she started to walk toward him, her heart a traitor beating out a rhythm she had long forgotten. Each step was like a drumbeat in the distance, echoing in her chest. She could feel the eyes of the room on her, but all that mattered was him.

She reached him, standing just a breath away. The space between them was electric, crackling with tension that neither of them could deny.

"You look beautiful," he said, his gaze sweeping over her with the same intensity that had once made her heart race, and her stomach flutter.

"You haven't changed," she replied, her voice steady, but her heart a different story.

He chuckled, low and dark, the sound sending a shiver through her. "Oh, I've changed, Valentina. Trust me. I've changed."

His words hit her like a punch to the gut. She could hear the weight of them, the subtext, the message that he wasn't the same man who once held her in his arms and whispered about their future. He was something else now. Someone else.

"I see that," she said, meeting his gaze, refusing to back down. The woman she had become wasn't one to shrink in the face of a challenge, no matter how much history they shared.

Juan Carlos's eyes flickered with something, something darker, more dangerous. "I've made choices," he said, his voice dropping lower, pulling her in, "choices that you don't know about. Choices that... changed everything."

Valentina's chest tightened. She wanted to ask what choices. She wanted to ask about the secrets, the deals made in shadowy rooms, the promises broken for power. But she already knew the answer.

Instead, she let the silence between them grow, thick and heavy. He was no longer the man she had fallen in love with. The man she had trusted. No, now he was a stranger wearing the skin of the man she used to know.

But there was something else too. A part of her that wanted to be consumed by him again. A part of her that missed the fire.

And the worst part? That fire hadn't really died.

"I need you, Valentina," he murmured, stepping closer, his presence enveloping her like a storm. "I need you to see me, to understand what I've become. But I need you to trust me. The way you used to."

Her heart stuttered in her chest, and for a moment, all she could hear was the deafening rush of blood in her ears.

She wanted to say no. To walk away, to hold her ground. But those same words, those same promises, were what had once torn her heart open. And here he was, asking her for a second chance. Not at love, but at something else. Something more dangerous.

"I don't know if I can trust you anymore," she said, the words sharp and quiet, a warning she wasn't sure he would heed.

"I don't need you to trust me, Valentina," he said, his voice fierce, raw. "I need you to want me."

And in that moment, she realized how dangerous this was, how dangerous *he* was. Because she could feel it in the way her pulse raced, the way the air between them thickened. The past had never truly gone away. And neither had they.

But in the end, the choice would never be hers alone.

Because when you let a storm back in, you don't just get caught in the rain. You drown.

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The evening light fell softly across the glass walls of the penthouse, casting long shadows over the sprawling city below. The skyline was a tangle of lights and shadows, a testament to the life she'd worked so hard to build, a life that felt solid, grounded, until this moment. The wind stirred the heavy curtains, and for a brief second, the room felt alive with the same energy that had once surged between them.

Valentina stood at the bar, the weight of the chilled glass of tequila in her hand grounding her, even as the air seemed to hum with something she couldn't quite shake off. She had come to this event with a clear purpose, work. Her career, her ambition, her

independence, these were the things that mattered now. Not the ghosts of her past. Not him.

But here he was. Juan Carlos Rodríguez. Standing across from her, a presence that filled the room even more than the penthouse's sweeping views of the city below. He hadn't changed, not really. At least not in the ways that mattered most. His tailored suit still fit him perfectly, his dark hair slicked back with that effortless air of command, and those eyes—those molten brown eyes that had once held all her secrets.

"You haven't changed," she said, her voice low and steady, though her heart was anything but.

It was a lie. Of course, he had changed. They both had. The woman who had once thrown herself into this man's arms, surrendering to his every touch and promise, was long gone. Time, distance, heartbreak, they had moulded her into someone different. Stronger. Wiser, maybe. At least, that's what she told herself.

He didn't answer right away. Instead, he took a slow, deliberate sip of his own drink, his gaze never leaving hers. And then, when he spoke, his voice was still that deep, assured baritone that had once sent shivers down her spine.

"You think so?" He leaned in slightly, a knowing smile creeping across his lips. "Or maybe I've just grown… wiser."

She swallowed hard, trying to ignore the way his presence still curled around her like smoke, familiar and intoxicating. "Wiser?" She arched an eyebrow, unable to hide the challenge in her voice. "Is that why you stopped calling? Stopped coming around? Because you grew wiser?"

She took a step forward, closing the distance between them, not caring that the room was suddenly too small, too hot. Her pulse quickened, the old rhythm between them kicking up like dust in the wind. She wouldn't let him off the hook so easily. Not after everything.

His smile faltered for just a moment, the first crack in his armour. But it didn't last. His expression tightened, the confident mask sliding back into place.

"You know as well as I do, Valentina," he said, his voice quiet but firm, "that some things are never meant to last."

Her chest tightened at the words. He was right, of course. She knew it. She'd spent years convincing

herself that their love had been doomed from the start, that everything they had been was always just a fantasy, a dream woven between stolen kisses and late-night promises.

But damn it, it didn't make it hurt any less.

"Maybe," she said, her voice sharp, her eyes narrowing as she leaned in closer. "But some things, like the truth, never change."

There was a flicker in his eyes, something dark and regretful, but he didn't break. He never did.

They stood there for a moment, suspended in time, the tension between them thick and palpable. The world outside the penthouse seemed to disappear, leaving only the two of them, locked in a silent battle of wills. He hadn't changed. Not really. But neither had she.

"You've changed," he said then, his voice softer, almost tentative. His gaze softened as he studied her, searching her face like he was looking for something he'd lost. "But I... I've never stopped thinking about you."

The words hit her like a freight train. She wasn't prepared for them, not after everything. Not after all

the time she'd spent convincing herself that their past was just that, past. But hearing him say it, feeling the weight of his confession, cracked something open inside her. Her breath caught in her throat before she could stop it, and for a heartbeat, she felt that familiar pull.

Her pulse was a furious beat, echoing in her ears. She had worked so damn hard to bury the past, to move on. But hearing him say those words, hearing the raw sincerity in his voice, made her question everything.

God, why did he have to do this now?

Before she could respond, a knock at the door shattered the moment. The sound was jarring, a sharp reminder of the reality they were both trying to avoid. Her eyes flicked to the door, and when she turned back, she saw that the spell between them had been broken. He was still there, still *him*, but the storm between them wasn't quite over. It was just beginning.

She closed her eyes briefly, trying to steady herself, to find her grounding in the chaos of emotions that had come rushing back.

"Just a minute," she called toward the door, her

voice steady, but there was no denying the shake in her hands as she placed her drink back on the bar.

Juan Carlos didn't speak, but she could feel the weight of his gaze on her, hot and heavy. He wasn't going anywhere.

Valentina turned toward him, her breath catching in her throat. "You're still a master at timing," she muttered, a small laugh escaping her lips. The moment felt absurd, painful, and exhilarating all at once.

He took a step toward her, his voice low, almost intimate. "You never were good at running away from me, Valentina." The words hung in the air like a challenge.

She swallowed hard, meeting his gaze. "I'm not running," she said, her voice cold, even as her heart betrayed her. "I just don't have time for distractions."

His smile deepened, but there was a shadow of something darker behind his eyes, something that hadn't been there before.

"Funny," he murmured, "I was about to say the same thing."

The knock at the door came again, more insist-

ent this time. Valentina felt the world rushing back around her, but she couldn't shake the pull between them, the fire that had never truly burned out.

With one last look, she turned away, heading toward the door, leaving Juan Carlos behind in the thick, charged silence. But even as she walked away, she could feel his eyes on her. And she knew that the storm between them was only just beginning to break.

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The morning sun bathed the city in a soft, golden light, but inside Valentina's office, it felt like a cold, indifferent world. The hum of the air conditioning and the sharp scent of freshly brewed coffee were the only things that anchored her to reality. She sat at her desk, flipping through her notes from last night's event, each word weighing more than the last. Her pen hovered over the page, but she couldn't focus. Her mind kept returning to him. To *Juan Carlos.*

Why now? she thought, clenching her jaw. She had worked hard to leave the past behind, to build a career that didn't involve him. The thought of their old life together, a life of passion, secrets and eventual betrayal, was a cloud that followed her even now. She

had told herself that she could bury those memories, that ambition would be her salvation. But Juan Carlos had always been a storm she couldn't outrun.

Her phone buzzed on the desk, shattering the silence. Her heart stuttered as she saw his name flash across the screen. *No, not now. Not like this.* But despite the warning bells in her mind, her fingers reached for the phone, her pulse quickening with each passing second.

"Valentina," his voice came through the receiver, rich and smooth, the tone a weapon and a caress all at once. It was the same voice she'd once fallen asleep to, the same voice that had whispered her name in the dark. "I want you to write about me."

Her breath caught, and her grip on the phone tightened. She could feel his presence on the other end of the line as if he were standing just outside her door. Her thoughts scattered, and for a moment, all she could hear was the beat of her own heart in her ears.

"You think I'm going to write some puff piece?" she asked, her voice tight, though the words felt like daggers. She wasn't going to play this game. Not again. "You know that's not how I work, Juan Carlos."

"I'm not asking for a puff piece," he replied, his tone unwavering, the calm confidence in his voice both infuriating and intoxicating. "I'm asking for the truth. The truth, Valentina. The truth you and I both know."

The words hung in the air, thick with a meaning she wasn't ready to face. *The truth.* The truth they shared—the truth that had destroyed them once. She exhaled sharply, but she didn't let herself answer immediately. She couldn't. The silence between them felt like a razor's edge.

Her mind screamed at her to hang up, to refuse, but something inside her, something deep, dark and aching wanted to hear what he had to say. Needed to hear it.

"Are you still the man I knew?" Her voice was small, barely a whisper, but it echoed in her chest like a gunshot. The question tasted bitter, a reminder of all the things she had tried to forget.

He was quiet for a moment, and when he spoke again, there was a dangerous edge to his voice. A tension that was as familiar as it was terrifying. "Am I still the man you knew?" he repeated, his words clipped.

"You were the one who left, Valentina. You're the one who walked away."

Her heart clenched at the words. She could feel the accusation in them, like a weight on her chest. She hadn't left him, she had left everything that he represented. The lies. The ambition. The way he had always been willing to sacrifice everything, including her, for power. And the cost? *Her soul.*

"You think I left because of you?" she retorted, her voice sharp now, laced with the anger she had buried for so long. "I left because I had to. I had to choose myself, Juan Carlos. You... you were never going to choose me. Not when it came down to it. You chose your career, your power, your future. And I was just... a casualty."

She could hear the sharp intake of breath on the other end of the line, his frustration palpable. But then, his voice softened, dangerously so. "I didn't ask you to leave, Valentina," he said, his words slow and deliberate. "But I'm asking you now... I'm asking you to trust me."

Her stomach twisted at the request. Trust him? After everything they had been through, after all the promises and lies? But there was something about

the way he said it, like a command wrapped in a plea that made her question everything.

She closed her eyes, leaning back in her chair, fighting the urge to surrender to the pull of his voice. "Trust you?" she whispered, the words tasting like ash. "And what happens when the truth comes out, Juan Carlos? What happens when all your secrets come to light?"

There was a long pause, an eternity of silence that felt like the moment before a storm broke. She could feel him, could almost see the way his jaw tightened, the way his eyes darkened with the weight of whatever he was hiding. But he didn't answer right away. Instead, he let the question hang between them, thick and suffocating.

"Then we both burn," he said, the finality in his voice sending a shiver down her spine.

The words were simple, but they cut through her like a blade. *We both burn.* She knew what he meant. She had always known that being with him was dangerous, that their love had always come with a price. But she hadn't realized until now just how high that price would be.

Her breath caught in her throat, her mind racing as the weight of his confession settled over her. She had always known that Juan Carlos was a man who would stop at nothing to get what he wanted. But hearing those words, feeling the truth of them in her bones, made her question everything.

What is he willing to sacrifice? she wondered. *What am I willing to lose for the sake of the truth?*

"Juan Carlos, I can't..." Her voice faltered, the words choking her. She couldn't let herself fall back into this. Into him. Into them.

But before she could say anything more, he spoke again, his voice low and insistent, as if he were trying to will her to understand. "You've always been the one to hold the power, Valentina. You were the one who could see through all of it. That's why I need you. I need you to write this story, not just for the world, but for us. For what we were, and for what we still could be."

The silence that followed was deafening. Her mind was a tangle of conflicting emotions, all crashing together. But deep down, she knew one thing for certain. The truth they shared could destroy them both. And yet, it was the only thing that could save them.

"Fine," she said, her voice barely a whisper, but resolute. "I'll write it. But know this, Juan Carlos. I won't protect you. Not this time."

The line went quiet for a moment, but she could feel the tension in the air, could hear the way his breath stilled at her words.

"Good," he finally said, his voice soft but full of meaning. "Because the truth, Valentina... it's always been you and me."

And with that, the call ended, leaving her alone in the silence, the weight of his words settling over her like a storm on the horizon.

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The city hummed with an electric pulse, the streets a chaotic river of sound and movement, but inside the grand auditorium, everything felt still. There was an undercurrent of tension that gripped the air, so thick it pressed against Valentina's chest. Her heartbeat reverberated in her ears, each beat a reminder of everything at stake.

She had always known that this moment would come, the moment where everything collided. She had watched him rise through the ranks, seen the

way he'd consumed power and ambition with the same hunger he'd once reserved for her. But now, here they were again, standing on opposite sides of a line that neither of them could erase.

Juan Carlos stood on the stage, his face illuminated by the bright spotlight, his body poised like a predator in waiting. He was everything she had once loved, everything she had once feared. The crowd roared with applause, the clapping nearly deafening, but she couldn't tear her eyes away from him. She didn't want to.

In that moment, as the eyes of the world were on him, Valentina understood the true price of ambition. He had claimed the future he wanted, but in doing so, he had left a trail of destruction behind him. And now, that destruction had a name. It was her.

She took a breath, steadying herself, the familiar mix of anger and longing stirring in her chest. *I didn't come for you,* she thought, but she knew that wasn't entirely true. She had come for the truth. She had come because the world deserved to know who Juan Carlos really was, what he had sacrificed, and who he had left behind in the process.

But then his voice pierced through the clamour, low and commanding, and her entire body stilled.

"Valentina."

Her pulse skipped. She turned slowly, her eyes locking with his. He was standing only a few feet away, his gaze intense, searching hers with an intensity that stole the breath from her lungs.

"You came," he said, his voice low and rough, a sound that threaded through the air like a lover's whisper.

"I didn't come for you," she replied, her voice steady, though it trembled just slightly at the edges. "I came for the truth."

He stepped closer, his presence filling the space between them. The warmth of his body seemed to radiate toward her, pulling her in against her will. *Damn him,* she thought, her body betraying her even as her mind screamed for control.

"You'll get it," he promised, his voice a murmur that only she could hear. "And you'll get me. All of me."

The words fell like a challenge, a promise, and a warning, all wrapped into one. Her stomach tight-

ened, but it wasn't fear, it was something else, something darker, deeper. The pull between them was undeniable, a gravitational force that she couldn't escape, even if she wanted to. And God, how she wanted to.

"Is that what you think this is?" Valentina's words were sharp, cutting through the thick tension that clung to the air. "That I'm just going to fall into your arms again? You've destroyed too much, Juan Carlos. Too many lives, too many promises."

He didn't flinch at her words. Instead, his lips curled into a wry smile, and there was something dangerous in the way his eyes darkened. "I never said you had to fall. But I never asked you to leave either."

Her breath caught. *He was right.*

He took another step forward, closing the distance between them until there was nothing separating them but the weight of their history. The heat from his body was overwhelming, almost suffocating, but she couldn't move. She was rooted to the spot, her heart racing, her pulse wild.

"Valentina," he murmured, his voice now a whisper that slid under her skin, "you think you're here for

the truth. But we both know the truth is a lie. There's only us. There always has been."

Her heart pounded in her chest, her mind screaming at her to pull away, to walk out of the room, to run as far as she could from this man. But she couldn't. She wouldn't. Not now. Not with the way he was looking at her, not with the way the words *we* and *us* still lingered in the air.

"I hate you," she whispered, but even she didn't believe it. It was a lie, a cover for the emotions she had buried for years. And when his lips brushed against her ear, so close she could feel his breath on her skin, she knew. She knew that this was the moment they had both been circling for so long.

"You don't hate me," he replied, his voice a velvet rasp that made her skin burn. "You love me. Just like I've always loved you."

She wanted to push him away. She wanted to say that it didn't matter anymore. But the truth was, she didn't want to. The need, the desire, was so raw, so primal that it swallowed her whole.

"Juan Carlos," she breathed, her voice breaking as he gently cupped her chin, tilting her head back so

she could meet his gaze. His eyes were full of something deep and unspoken, something that made her stomach twist.

"Shhh," he murmured, his thumb brushing across her lower lip. "No more words. Just feel."

His lips were on hers before she could protest, hard and demanding, but there was tenderness beneath the heat, something that was all too familiar. She sank into him, her body leaning into the kiss as if it was the only thing that kept her tethered to reality. His hands were everywhere, sliding over her skin, pulling her closer, deeper, as if trying to consume her, to make her a part of him once again.

And then, for a moment, there was no past. No lies. No ambition. Only him, only her. Only the warmth of their bodies and the fire that ignited between them.

But just as quickly as the passion flared, a memory shattered the moment, the memory of everything they had lost. The betrayal. The broken trust. The way he had left her shattered, alone, just to climb higher.

She pulled away, gasping for air, her eyes wide as she tried to steady herself. He looked at her, his face a mixture of hunger and something softer, almost regretful.

"I won't let you go again," he said, his voice rough, a plea more than a promise. "Not this time."

"You already did," she whispered, the words barely a breath, but they carried all the weight of her heart. "You let me go the moment you chose this."

The silence that followed was suffocating, but in it, Valentina knew the truth. The love they had shared, the passion that still flickered between them, would always be marred by the shadows of their choices. They couldn't outrun the consequences, no matter how much they wanted to.

But in that moment, as they stood there, two broken souls bound by a love too complicated to untangle, she realized one thing, no matter how much they fought it, some battles were meant to be lost.

And the battle between them was one neither of them could ever win.

The End

The last first kiss

Matilde Oliveira

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In the midst of the chaos, there was only one thing that mattered. One man.

Matilde Oliveira, a South American spitfire with a heart of gold and a drill bit for a tongue, juggles assisting at the local dentist's office with a burgeoning career as a romance novelist. Her short stories, filled with more cavities than a teenage sugar rush, explore the sweet and sometimes tooth-achingly painful world of love, romance and South American passion.

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